

BOOK REVIEWS

Beach, Bert Beverly. *Ecumenism—Boon or Bane?* Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1974. 314 pp. + 6 unnumbered pages of Index. \$8.95/\$6.95.

The author of *Vatican II: Bridging the Abyss* has brought us another publication in which his expertise in dealing with ecumenical affairs is fully manifested. In his Introduction to this new volume, the author suggests that the question in its title is a significant one which "the thinking Christian cannot ignore," and moreover, that a "simple 'boon' or 'bane' reply would be as meaningless as it would be deceptive" (p. 16). Some two dozen brief but information-packed chapters following the Introduction (which is a fairly lengthy chapter in itself) provide ample evidence of the correctness of both of the foregoing suggestions. Well qualified both as an historian and a first-hand observer and participant in various activities of the present-day "ecumenical movement," Beach traverses with ease and accuracy both the historical backgrounds and the current issues.

Five chapters ("Ecumenical—Past, Present, Prospect," "A Story of Division," "A Story of Fifteen Centuries of 'Unity,'" "The Church Becomes the Churches," and "Dressing the Ecumenical Soil") provide a necessary historical backdrop by tracing the concepts—and the historical realities (or unrealities)—of Christian unity and unification down through the centuries of the Christian era (pp. 23-82). Next follows a chapter entitled "The Ecumenical Tide Rolls In" (pp. 83-108), which traces the development of the modern ecumenical movement itself from the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 up through the Bangkok Conference (the latest significant meeting at the time this book was written). Beach does go beyond this latter meeting by looking forward to, and briefly speculating about, a planned 1975 Djakarta fifth meeting of the Assembly of the World Council of Churches (which, incidentally, actually met in Nairobi, Kenya). The author's brief notations and evaluations regarding the theological and practical perspectives of such meetings of the World Assembly as Evanston 1954 and Uppsala 1968 are useful.

The next chapter, "Is Division Sin?" (pp. 109-115), deals with a central concept underlying ecumenism. In this chapter Beach analyzes the claim which is "frequently repeated in ecumenical literature that division is sin" (p. 109) and perceptively points out what ecumenists generally fail to note: "There is no doubt that spiritual division and spiritual alienation are sins, but organizational and ecclesiastical division is often simply a recognition of divisive heretical tendencies, apostasy, or immoral practices causing the already existing spiritual division. *Not separating* ('come out of her, my people') from such divisive influence and unspirituality could very well be sin" (p. 111).

The further chapters in this volume (a total of 17) treat various specific issues of vital concern in assessing the ecumenical movement, such as doc-

trinal softness, recent syncretistic tendencies, attenuation in evangelistic and missionary enterprise, socio-political emphasis, and "eschatological blindness." Each chapter is profusely documented with statements from authoritative writers (some of the striking cautions or expressions of concern come from leading spokesmen for the ecumenical movement itself). The author's familiarity with historical antecedents and with current trends in many parts of the world enable him to illustrate in an interesting, helpful, and authoritative way the various points that he makes. He indicates with fairness modern ecumenism's strengths and contributions, but also unflinchingly calls attention to its vulnerable points and weaknesses. And it is notable that throughout his discussion he repeatedly calls attention to the biblical perspective in relationship to the various issues with which he deals.

It is evident that this book by a Seventh-day Adventist church administrator in Northern Europe (he is currently executive secretary of the Northern Europe-West Africa Division of Seventh-day Adventists, with offices in St. Albans, England) is addressed primarily to Seventh-day Adventists, for it includes a set of "SDA Questions Regarding the WCC" (pp. 283-292); but this reviewer would hasten to add that in his opinion the book has great value for any interested reader, regardless of denominational affiliation. Its penetrating coverage of a wide array of relevant issues, carefully weighed and evaluated, provides a helpful review for the specialist and a comprehensive introduction for the layman in the field of ecumenical studies. A "Glossary of Terms" (pp. 293-296) will be of added help to the general reader. And the volume includes an extensive bibliography of works referred to (pp. 297-314), as well as an index (unnumbered pp. 315-320).

This book is particularly well written, and the author's flair for picturesque expression enhances the readability (as one example: "These statements or declarations [ecumenical statements or declarations analyzing world problems] almost invariably suffer from a kind of Biblical vitamin deficiency, causing eschatological anemia and Parousia blindness" [p. 197]). Perhaps the major fault of the book—if indeed it may be classified as a fault—is the fact that such a large number and array of authorities are quoted or referred to that it becomes difficult at times for the reader to keep in mind just who these individuals are and why they are important to the discussion. The name of W. A. Visser 't Hooft is undoubtedly so well known to the general reader as not to need identification, but the same may not be true about a multitude of less familiar figures. It should be stated, however, that the author has obviously endeavored to be helpful by what is an apparent attempt to identify persons whenever they are first mentioned in the text.

In conclusion, it may be reiterated that *Ecumenism—Boon or Bane?* presents a broad overview of both the historical backgrounds and the major current issues of concern with regard to the modern ecumenical movement. It has been written by an expert who approaches his subject from the biblical perspective, and who provides information and insights which should prove valuable to specialists and to laymen alike.